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Testimony of Richard Sparaco Executive Director Board of Pardons and Paroles

Joint Committee on Appropriations

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Good afternoon, Representative Walker, Senator Formica, Senator Osten, Representative Ziobron and honorable members of the Joint Committee on Appropriations. My name is Richard Sparaco, and I serve as the Executive Director for the Board of Pardons and Paroles. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of the **Governor's Proposed Budget for the FY 2018-2019 Biennium.**

The Board of Pardons and Paroles ("Board") is an autonomous agency within the Department of Correction ("DOC") for administrative purposes only. As a result, the Board's budget regularly appears as a line item within the larger DOC budget. The Board is both a physical panel made up of individuals, as well as an agency vested with the independent authority to: (1) grant or deny parole; (2) establish conditions of parole or special parole; (3) rescind or revoke parole or special parole; and (4) grant pardons, commutations and certificates of employability. Additionally, the Board is responsible for administering incoming and outgoing parole transfers and extraditions under the Interstate Compact for Adult Offender Supervision: an agreement that facilitates transfers of supervision in fifty states and three U.S. territories.

The Board relies on information obtained from the Judicial Branch and numerous state, local and federal criminal justice agencies to obtain the information necessary to make decisions that serve to simultaneously protect the public and facilitate the successful reintegration of suitable individuals into the community. The Board has implemented an *evidence-based* decision-making process that is guided by sound, empirical research. This process has resulted in more efficient and effective outcomes—outcomes that make better use of public resources and, ultimately, reduce future crime.

The Board is fully cognizant of the State's challenging financial situation and acknowledges the need for the State to operate within its means. We also recognize the tremendous demands placed on the limited amount of available tax revenue and the simple fact that it is not possible to fund each and every program to the extent requested. The Board remains committed to the efficient and careful use of every dollar appropriated. As a relatively small agency, we have strived to be a good steward of fiscal resources by conservatively filling only the positions required to meet our immediate needs. Although our role has expanded, we have managed to absorb costs and have refrained from requesting any additional funds above what is absolutely necessary.

It is important to not only highlight our continuing role in Connecticut's Criminal Justice System, but to also note the changes that impacted us during the past biennium. In 2015, the General Assembly passed Public Act 15-2, An Act Implementing Provisions of the State Budget for the Biennium Ending JUNE 30, 2017, Concerning General Government Provisions Relating to Criminal Justice, and Public Act 15-84, An Act Concerning Lengthy Sentences for Crimes Committed by a Child or Youth and the Sentencing of a Child or Youth Convicted of Certain Felony Offenses. The Board began to implement these acts almost immediately and worked diligently to develop policy and procedure, train Board members and staff and apply the law as intended.

To date, the Board has implemented these changes without requesting any additional funding while absorbing both a 6% increase in regular parole hearings and a 25% increase in pardons hearings as a result of a 63% increase in pardons applications. In addition, the Board has implemented an expedited pardons hearing process and is working to implement an expedited parole hearing process.

The Board supports the Governor's proposed budget and remains committed to fulfilling all of its responsibilities in the most efficient and sustainable manner possible; however, we are concerned any changes to funds as appropriated in previous fiscal years may compromise our ability to: (1) implement new programs as mandated; and (2) review and improve existing practices as required by these Public Acts.

I appreciate this opportunity to provide testimony and am happy to answer any questions you may have or provide any additional information you may require.

Thank you.